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# ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

## MIDWAY MEETING HOUSE

IN

### **Liberty County, Georgia,**

ON THE SECOND WEDNESDAY IN MARCH, 1889,

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE RELAYING OF THE CORNER STONE OF A  
MONUMENT TO BE ERECTED IN HONOR OF  
THE FOUNDERS OF MIDWAY CHURCH  
AND CONGREGATION;

BY

CHARLES C. JONES, JR., LL. D.

AUGUSTA, GA.

CHRONICLE PUBLISHING COMPANY.  
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## THE ADDRESS.

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*Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

The fifth, sixth, and seventh days of December 1852 were memorable in the history of Midway Church and of Liberty County.

On Sabbath this venerable temple was crowded to repletion, and from its sacred desk the Rev. Dr. I. S. K. Axson, of blessed memory, delivered a discourse replete with recollections of a brave and happy past, commemorative of a contented and prosperous present, and filled with encouragement for the future.

As the sun rose on Monday morning he was saluted by salvos from field-guns manned by a detachment of the Chatham Artillery from Savannah, posted on yonder green. Generously responding to a courteous invitation extended by the good citizens of Liberty, this ancient and honorable Company had come to participate in the ceremonies of the occasion and, with their Washington guns, to evoke responsive echoes alike from patriotic breasts and from the depths of these moss-clad swamps. From a Liberty pole, planted in front of the church, floated the National colors. The roads were crowded with vehicles, journeying from every part of the County, filled with joyous occupants, all converging to this historic spot. By ten o'clock in the forenoon was seen a convocation such as this region had never witnessed at any former period. The venerable and beloved Col. William Maxwell, with military bearing and elastic step and wearing two blue rosettes, was President of the Day. He was assisted by Captains Peter W. Fleming and Abiel Winn as Grand Marshalls. The German Brass Band from Savannah was present. A broad banner bearing the legends "*Our Fathers: St. John's Parish 1752:*"—and "*Our Country, our whole Country: the land of the Free and the Home of the Brave, 1852*" is borne by the chairman of the Committee of Arrangements, Mr. Thomas Q. Cassels, supported by Captain Cyrus

Mallard. On the Sunbury road a stately procession is formed which moves to the Church where, after an ode—composed for the occasion by the Rev. Samuel J. Cassels—is sung, a historical oration is delivered by Mr. John B. Mallard. These ceremonies concluded, the assembly repairs to the green in front of this sacred edifice. After prayer by the Rev. Dr. Charles Colcock Jones, and an address by the Rev. John Winn, the corner stone of a monument is laid. Then follows a salute from the Artillery, and the ceremonies of the Day culminate in a banquet. Despite the clouds and the rain of the 7th, the Artillerists fire their guns, the Band discourses martial music, and the citizens repair *en masse* to Midway Church to complete the observance of the programme prescribed for the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of an event famous in the annals of this County. Again was the procession formed as on the previous day, and the column marched to the Church, where the hon: William Law—than whom no more courteous gentleman, eloquent advocate, profound jurist, and fair minded Judge ever adorned society and maintained the standard of true excellency in this region,—delivered an oration remarkable for its dignity, appositeness, and eloquence. As on the preceding day, the festivities terminated with a bountiful banquet. At both these feasts numerous toasts were offered, and many patriotic and pleasing responses were made. And so the celebration ended. All hearts were filled with gladness. Nothing had occurred to interrupt the harmony or mar the pleasure of the occasion. Those who remember this convocation, and whose privilege it was to have witnessed, and to have participated in the observances of this centennial celebration, recur to it and to them as a privileged memory,—as a charming retrospect, luminous with hope, plenty, generosity, patriotism, friendship, gratitude, and genuine manhood.

And what, my friends, was the meaning of this unusual demonstration at this time honored Church and in the midst of these silent shades? Why was the sober heart of old Liberty thus stirred to its inmost depths? Why was the repose of this consecrated Church-yard and of these circumjacent forests disturbed by the reverberations of the thunders of cannon?

Why these martial strains, this outpouring of the multitude, these orations, the laying of this corner stone, these banquets, and these inspiring utterances? The answer is simple. After the lapse of a hundred years the citizens of this County, with one accord and in glad acclaim, assembled at this historic spot—the home of morality and of religion,—a primal altar of liberty in the Revolutionary crisis, and the trysting place of patriots—to do honor to the memory of their fathers, and to set apart a place whereon a monument should rise to tell to the coming generations what they had accomplished in the great battle for truth, for freedom, and for God. Loyal was the sentiment and praiseworthy the motive which prompted this convocation. It comported well with the public spirit and the patriotic impulses which characterized the community. It was a just tribute to a worthy past. It certified the dignity of the former years, testified the gratitude of the present, and augured well for the future.

Did time permit, and were it appropriate to this occasion, most pleasing would be the office to portray the circumstances connected with the removal of the Dorchester and Beech-Island congregations from South Carolina to the Midway District in Georgia,—to recount the industry, the perseverance, and the triumphs of these settlers in bringing these primeval and marish lands into a state of cultivation,—to review their labors in the cause of agriculture, education, morality, and religion,—to tell the pious story of their guarded lives and of those divine ministrations for the stated observance of which a former temple was here erected,—to revive the memory of their leaders in the avocations of peace and war, and in the service of Jehovah,—to give tongue to the noble dead who sleep in yonder church yard,—to open the Revolutionary chapter in the history of this youthful Commonwealth and stir your hearts at remembrance of the deeds of heroism which were here enacted,—to remind you of the glorious part borne by St. John's Parish when, acting in advance of the Colony, the inhabitants, exhibiting a chivalry, fearlessness, and patriotism worthy of all admiration, and protesting against the encroachments of Parliament, declared for freedom, and sent Lyman



Hall as a special delegate to the Continental Congress, and to assure you how famously they sustained themselves in the face of invasion, conflagration, and overwhelming loss, struggling manfully until manifest wrongs were redressed, inalienable rights acknowledged, and national independence was achieved.

Sir James Wright was not far from the mark when he located the head of the rebellion in St. John's Parish, and advised the Earl of Dartmouth that the rebel measures there inaugurated were to be mainly referred to the influence of the "descendants of New England people of the Puritan Independent sect" who, retaining "a strong tincture of Republican or Oliverian principles, entered into an agreement among themselves to adopt both the resolutions and the association of the Continental Congress." On the altars erected within the Midway District were the fires of resistance by Georgia to the dominion of England earliest kindled: and Dr. Lyman Hall, of all the dwellers there, by his counsels, exhortations, and determined spirit added stoutest fuel to the flames. Between the immigrants from Dorchester and the distressed Bostonians existed not only the ties of a common parentage, but also sympathies engendered by kindred religious, moral, social, and political training. It is not difficult to comprehend why the members of this Midway Congregation, at such an early date and in such an emphatic way, acknowledged themselves to be Revolutionists. The Puritan element, cherishing and proclaiming intolerance of an Established Church and disbelief in the divine right of Kings, impatient of restraint, accustomed to independent thought and action, and uninfluenced by associations which encouraged tender memories of, and love for the mother country, asserted its hatreds, its affiliations, and its hopes with no uncertain utterance, and appears to have moulded and dominated the action of the entire parish.

Crowned with hallowed associations is this spot, and filled with bravest recollections is the adjacent region. This Church where our fathers worshipped, and where our infant feet were taught the paths of peace and righteousness, rose from the ashes of a former temple burnt by ribald British soldiery. Within



its porches patriots, with arms in their hands, were wont to assemble, while from the sacred desk the warrior parson,—his sword laid on altar,—inculcated in the same breath obedience to God and resistance to tyrants. Just at the head of yonder causeway a breastwork was, in November 1778, erected and armed with two field pieces. Here Colonel White, with one hundred Continentals and militia, proposed to dispute the advance of Colonel Prevost who, issuing from Florida, was moving through and plundering Southern Georgia. At Bull Town Swamp he had been confronted by a patriotic band too feeble to stay his onward march. Among the wounded were Colonel John Baker, Captain Cooper, and William Goulding. At North Newport Bridge [subsequently known as Riceboro Bridge] further resistance was encountered at the hands of the sons of Liberty, but they were impotent to arrest the progress of the desolating column. Major William Baker, with a detachment of mounted militia, continued to skirmish with the enemy and, at every convenient point, strove to impede his advance. On the morning of the 20th of November Colonel White was joined by General James Screven, accompanied by twenty militia men. A conference between these leaders resulted in a resolution to abandon the defensive position in front of Midway Meeting House, and to select another about a mile and a half in the direction of the enemy, where the public road leading from Savannah to Darien passed through a thick wood. There, it was thought, an ambuscade might be advantageously laid. The contemplated movement was promptly made. Conducted by the notorious McGirth, who was entirely familiar with the locality, Prevost had arranged to place a party in ambush in the identical forest chosen by the Americans for a similar purpose. The opposing forces arrived upon the ground almost simultaneously, and firing immediately commenced within cannon range of the spot where we are now assembled. Early in the action the gallant General James Screven—renowned for his patriotism and beloved for his virtues—received a severe wound and fell into the hands of the enemy. Although a prisoner and suffering from a mortal hurt, he was, by his captors—British and Tories—inhumanly

butchered. A shot from one of the American field pieces passed through the neck of Prevost's horse, and both animal and rider went down. Major Roman,—commanding the artillery,—supposing that the British leader had been killed, quickly advanced his two field pieces to take advantage of the existing confusion; and Major James Jackson, thinking the enemy was retreating, shouted *victory*. Prevost however, soon appeared mounted upon another horse, and quickly led his troops in a vigorous charge. Overborne by superior numbers, Colonel White retreated, with his command, upon Midway Meeting House, breaking down the bridges as he retired across the causeway, and keeping out small parties to annoy the enemy's flanks. Compelled to withdraw still further, he fell back along the line of the Savannah and Darien road in the direction of the Great Ogeechee Ferry. Desiring by stratagem to retard the pursuit of the enemy, he “prepared a letter as though it had been written to himself by Colonel Elbert, directing him to retreat in order to draw the British as far as possible, and informing him that a large body of cavalry had crossed over Ogeechee river with orders to gain the rear of the enemy, by which their whole force would be captured.” This letter was so dropped as, in the end, to find its way into the hands of Colonel Prevost, who seems to have regarded it as genuine. It is believed that it exerted a potent influence in repressing his forward movement which was prosecuted in the direction of Savannah not more than six or seven miles beyond Midway Meeting House.

Meanwhile McGirth, reconnoitering with a strong detachment in the direction of Sunbury, ascertained that the expedition under Lieutenant Colonel Fuser had not arrived. This circumstance, in connection with the impending movement of the Rebel force embodied by Colonels Elbert and White at Great Ogeechee Ferry,—where a breast-work had been thrown up and preparations had been made vigorously to dispute his further progress,—determined Prevost to abandon his enterprise and return to St. Augustine.

Treating the population as in rebellion against a lawful sovereign, and utterly refusing to stipulate for the security of

the country, the English Commander, upon his retreat, burnt Midway Meeting House, and all dwellings, negro-quarters, rice-barns, improvements, and harvested crops within his reach. The region was ruthlessly plundered. The track of his retiring army was marked by smoking ruins. His followers, unrestrained, indulged in indiscriminate pillage, appropriating plate, bedding, wearing apparel, jewels, provisions, and everything of value capable of easy transportation. The inhabitants, without distinction of age or sex, were subjected to insult, indignity, and robbery. St. John's Parish suffered terribly, and the patriotism of the people was sorely tried. The ruin was akin to that subsequently wrought when General Augustine Prevost, in 1779, raided through the rich plantations of South Carolina, or when the Federal Cavalry, under General Kilpatrick, in the winter of 1864-1865 over-ran, occupied, and devastated Liberty County, converting a well-ordered and abundantly supplied region into an abode of poverty, lawlessness, and desolation.

It will be remembered that in the autumn of 1778 Lord George Germain resolved to transfer the theatre of active warfare from the Northern to the Southern Provinces. His hopes were fixed upon the subjugation and permanent occupation of Georgia and South Carolina. The former was to be invaded by forces issuing from East Florida, while Colonel Archibald Campbell, sailing from New York, was to supplement this movement by a direct attack upon Savannah. Caught thus between the upper and the nether millstone, it was confidently believed that Georgia would speedily be ground down into absolute submission to British rule.

With a view to distracting the attention of General Howe and the Continental forces concentrated for the protection of Savannah, General Prevost dispatched from St. Augustine two expeditions—one by sea to operate directly against Sunbury, and the other by land to march through and lay waste the lower portions of Georgia. At Sunbury both armies were to form a junction preliminary to their united movement upon Savannah. Of the detachment conveyed by water and consisting of infantry and artillery, Lieutenant Colonel Fuser

was placed in command; while the conduct of the column penetrating by land was intrusted to Lieutenant Colonel Prevost. How this latter column was thwarted in compassing its objective we have already seen.

Delayed by head-winds, Colonel Fuser did not arrive in front of Sunbury until Prevost had entered upon his retreat and was beyond the reach of communication. Late in November 1778 his vessels,—transporting some five hundred men, battering cannon, field artillery, and mortars,—anchored abreast of Colonel's island. A debarkation was effected at the shipyard. Thence the land-forces, with field pieces, moving by the main road, marched upon Sunbury. The armed vessels sailed up Midway River in concert, and took position in front of the fort and in the back river opposite the town simultaneously with its investment on the land side by the infantry and artillery. Col. John McIntosh with one hundred and twenty seven Continental troops and some militia and citizens of Sunbury—numbering less than two hundred in all—held Fort Morris. The town was otherwise unprotected. Having completed his dispositions, Colonel Fuser demanded the surrender of the Fort,—then the most important work on the Georgia Coast. To this demand Colonel McIntosh returned the laconic and brave response: "Come and take it."

To the inhuman intimation that if the demand was not complied with the British Commander would apply the torch at his end of the town, McIntosh replied: "Whenever Colonel Fuser fires Sunbury on his side, I will apply the torch at my end, and let the flames meet in mutual conflagration."

Instead of assaulting, Fuser hesitated, and awaited a report from scouts whom he had sent into the interior to ascertain the movements of Prevost and learn when a junction of his forces might be expected. That officer, as we have seen, unwilling, after the affair near Midway Meeting House, to hazard an engagement with the Continental troops supposed to be advancing from the Great Ogeechee ferry, and surprised at the non-appearance of Fuser before Sunbury, had commenced his retreat and was already beyond the reach of easy communication. Surprised and chagrined at the intelligence, Fuser

raised the siege, reembarked his troops, and returned to the river St. John, where he met the retiring forces of Prevost. Mutual recriminations ensued between these officers, each charging upon the other the responsibility of the failure of the respective expeditions.

Although Colonel Campbell, in December 1778, succeeded in capturing Savannah, be it remembered in praise of the valor of St. John's Parish and of the co-operative aid of the soldiers of the Midway Congregation, that the columns of Colonels Prevost and Fuser were successfully met and thwarted in their scheme for participation in the subjugation of the Capital of Georgia.

Upon the fall of Savannah, General Prevost invested Sunbury and compassed the capture of that town with its dependent fort,—then commanded by Major Lane. Seventeen commissioned officers and one hundred and ninety five non-commissioned officers and privates—Continental troops and militia included—constituted the garrison which then capitulated. Twenty four pieces of brass ordnance, one brass seven inch mortar, twenty pieces of iron ordnance, eight hundred and twenty four round shot of various sizes, one hundred stands of case and grape shot, thirty shells, fifty hand grenades, one hundred and eighty muskets with bayonets, twelve rifles, forty fuses and carbines, four wall pieces, and a considerable quantity of powder and small-arm ammunition fell into the hands of the enemy. Among the Americans one captain and two privates were killed, and six men were wounded. The Washington and Bullock galleys ran down to Ossabaw island where they were stranded on the beach and burned.

Sunbury was then the rival of Savannah in population and commercial importance, and Fort Morris was the most formidable Rebel fortification in Georgia.

Thus the dominion of St. John's Parish, despite the heroic endeavors of its inhabitants, passed into the hands of the Crown, to be wrested therefrom only upon the repossession of Savannah by General Wayne, in June 1782. Until the happening of this auspicious event the sea coast of Georgia remained in a most pitiable condition. Plundering banditti



roved about, intent upon missions of insult, pillage, and inhumanity. The times were sadly out of joint, but the patriotism and the endurance of the inhabitants were equal to the emergency.

I may not, my friends, compress within the limits of this hour even allusions to the various acts of gallant emprise on land and water which then transpired within the limits of the Midway District, or particularize the conflicts between Republicans and Loyalists, the encounters with Indians, and the exhibitions of patience, of valor, of individual prowess, and of wisdom which characterized the conduct of the leading members of Midway Congregation, and of the inhabitants of St. John's Parish.

Did time permit, with filial reverence would we recall the memories of this brave epoch in the life of this community. Here dwelt Lyman Hall and Button Gwinnett—signers of the Declaration of Independence—Richard Howly and Nathan Brownson,—early governors of Georgia,—Moses Allen, Benjamin Baker, Benjamin Andrew, Colonels William and John Baker, Generals James Screven and Daniel Stewart, Colonel John McIntosh, Major John Jones, and many others,—patriots all,—who risked fortune and life in support of country and freedom during this primal struggle for independence. Here was the scene of the professional labors of Doctors Dunwoody, Alexander, and West, and among the citizens were numbered clergymen, teachers, and planters, whose influence was potent in their day and generation, and whose names, if here repeated, would challenge respect and veneration.

“Oblivion is not to be hired.” Blindly scattering her poppy, she deals with places and with periods as with men, and they become as though they had not been. Nature survives, but nearly all the rest is shadow. In this soil so fecund, neglected gravestones—quickly covered with brambles and overturned by envious forest trees—“tell truth scarce forty years.”

Behold the changes which have overtaken this venerable Church! Mark the decadence in population, wealth, and influence which has occurred in this congregation, and in this



swamp-region of Liberty County once so prosperous and happy! Surely the buried treasures of the past are here far more conspicuous than the expectations of the present. We feel as though we were walking in a vain shadow.

Behold the desolation which has swept over Sunbury once the rival of Savannah in commercial importance, and the home of refinement, of commercial enterprise, of comfort, and of hospitality! Bereft of trade, despoiled of communications, its squares, lots, streets and lanes converted into a corn-field,—even the bricks of the ancient chimneys carted away for other uses,—no sails whitening the blue waters of Midway River,—the old cemetery so overgrown with trees and brambles that the graves of the dead cannot be located after the most diligent search,—Fort Morris, erstwhile the military pride of the coast, utterly abandoned and enveloped in a wild growth of cedars and myrtles,—academy, churches, market-house, billiard-room, wharves, store-houses, residences, all gone, and only the bold Bermuda covered bluff and the beautiful river with the green island slumbering in its embrace to remind us of this lost town! A stranger pausing here would find scarcely a trace of the past, formerly so replete with life and importance, but now existent only in the skeleton memories which redeem place and name from that oblivion which sooner or later is the common lot of all things human. The same bold bluff,—the same broad expanse of marshes stretching onward to the confines of the Atlantic,—the same blue outlines of Colonel's island and the Bryan shore,—the same sea-washed beach of St. Catherine,—the same green island dividing the river as it ebbs and flows with restless tide,—the same soft sea-breezes,—the same over-arching skies, benignant sun, and pale-faced moon,—the same sweet voices and tranquil scene which nature gave and still perpetuates,—but all else how changed! Here have we no continuing city. Nevertheless, from out the shadows of this almost forgotten past appear manly forms and recollections of memorable occurrences which, triumphing over the decay of time and place, claim honorable immortality, and inspire hope for the future of a region the history of which has been dignified by such exhibitions of worth and excellence.

During the progress of the Revolution no people could have been more loyal to the cause of liberty, none more patient under privations, none more active in the defence of home and country than the members of this Midway Congregation. And, when the war was ended, rebuilding their habitations, and causing their wasted plantations to bloom as a garden, the inhabitants,—still clinging to the religious and patriotic sentiments of their fathers,—entered upon a career of prosperity, of morality, of education, and of refinement which, until the region was overtaken by the desolations consequent upon the late conflict between the States, won for Liberty County a reputation second to none within the wide borders of this Commonwealth.

Although the shadows of penury and of desuetude are resting upon this venerable church, there are memories of holy men and virtuous women, of worthy deeds and significant events, of noble aspirations and elevating influences, which the lapse of years has not obliterated, which the mutations of fortune have not consigned to oblivion. In their conservation we take a loyal interest, and of them we are justly proud.

With the history of the Midway Congregation from the close of the Revolutionary war until the centennial celebration in 1852,—with the names, virtues, and services of the pious pastors who ministered in sacred things at this altar,—with the influence exerted in the cause of liberty, morality, education, and religion, and with the names and deeds of those who, having received their training here, went abroad in the land to illustrate whatever was of good repute in the stations of clergyman, teacher, lawyer, physician, jurist, statesman, missionary, scientist, senator, representative, minister plenipotentiary, and planter, you have on a former occasion been fully advised. The historic lesson you have learned is worthy of every remembrance. Even while I speak, you instinctively call the roll of honor, and your cheeks are suffused with conscious pride as the prominent actors, living and dead, move in stately procession before your admiring gaze.

When the centennial was celebrated in 1852 everything relating to this congregation and county was in a prosperous

and satisfactory condition. While there were few who could lay claim to large estates, the planters of this community were in comfortable circumstances. They were industrious, observant of their obligations, humane in the treatment of their servants, given to hospitality, fond of manly exercise, and solicitous for the moral and intellectual education of their children. The traditions of the fathers gave birth to patriotic impulses and encouraged a high standard of honor, integrity, and manhood. The military spirit survived in the person of the Liberty Independent Troop; and, on stated occasions, contests involving rare excellence in horsemanship and in the use of the sabre and pistol attracted the gaze of the public and won the approving smiles of noble women. Leisure hours were spent in hunting and fishing, and in social intercourse. Of litigation there was little. Misunderstandings, when they occurred, were usually accommodated by honorable arbitration. Personal responsibility, freely admitted, engendered mutual respect and a most commendable degree of manliness. The rules of morality and of the Church were respected, acknowledged and upheld. The community was well-ordered and prosperous, and the homes of the inhabitants were peaceful and happy. Of all the political divisions of this Commonwealth none was more substantial, observant of law, or better instructed than the county of Liberty. Envidable was her position in the sisterhood of counties. In bringing about this satisfactory condition of affairs the influence of Midway Church and its congregation was very potent. The Reverend Doctor I. S. K. Axson was then the beloved pastor, and he was assisted by the Rev. T. S. Winn. Doctor Axson resigning on the 9th of November 1853, a call was tendered to the Rev. Edward Palmer of South Carolina. This call being declined, on the 30th of March 1854 the Rev. D. L. Buttolph was chosen as co-pastor with the Rev. Mr. Winn.

In March 1855 a portion of the Midway Congregation withdrew and organized a Presbyterian church in Walthourville under the pastorate of the Rev. Dr. John Jones.

On the 2nd of January 1855, the Rev. T. S. Winn resigned his pastoral charge; and, on the 12th of March in the same

year, the Rev. John F. Baker was elected co-pastor with Dr. Buttolph. At his own request Mr. Baker was excused from entering upon his ministerial engagement until November 1855, and the Rev. R. Q. Mallard was elected as a temporary supply. Mr. Baker's connection with the church was of short duration. It was, on his own motion, severed on the 4th of February 1856.

To fill the vacancy thus caused, the Rev. Francis H. Bowman was called on the 1st of October 1856. On the 11th of March 1857, he was regularly elected co-pastor. Resigning this position on the 24th of May 1859, in March 1860 the Rev. Donald Fraser was chosen to fill his place, but the tender was declined. The Reverend Dr. Buttolph continued to be the pastor of the Church. He was beloved by all, and held this office during the war. After 1860 no co-pastor was elected, but it appears, by the Minutes, that an effort was made to employ a missionary at a salary of six hundred dollars. In this capacity the Rev. Donald Fraser served for some time; and, in 1863, while Dr. Buttolph was absent on leave, Rev. Richard Way ministered in holy things.

I am informed by my friend the Hon. John L. Harden,—to whom I am indebted for the foregoing information touching the terms of service of the late pastors of this congregation,—that between the month of March 1864 and the 9th of March 1887, there occurred no annual meetings of the officers and “right-holders” of Midway Church. Meanwhile, the Presbyterian congregation, at Gravel Hill, or Flemington, had been organized, and the entire region had been prostrated by the disastrous termination of the Confederate struggle for Independence. During the war between the States the manhood of this community was enlisted in the armies of the Confederacy. Everything was subordinated to the exigencies of the trying emergency.

While during the progress of the war, and until the fall of Savannah in December 1864, the ordinances of religion and divine ministrations were regularly observed by the Midway congregation—led by that gentle Christian and beloved man of God, the Rev. Dr. Buttolph,—so soon as Kilpatrick's cavalry

over-ran the region, plundering and demoralizing everything and in all places, there fell upon this venerable church and its worshippers a dark curtain of penury, of disappointment, and of desuetude, which has never been wholly lifted. It was a mournful chapter in the history of this community when these unrestrained freebooters roamed at large through these peaceful highways, occupied this holy temple, desecrated it with ribald oaths, stripped it of every garniture, plundered adjacent plantations, wantonly insulted and robbed defenceless women, children, old men, and even negroes, perpetrated repeated acts of violence, lawlessness, and depravity, uprooted the foundations of society, overturned domestic relations, and converted a well-ordered, unarmed region into a terrorized pandemonium. From that shock there has never been recovery. Aside from the positive and direct losses encountered at this time, the liberation of the slave population has wrought a change in the conduct of agricultural operations in this malarial region far more radical and enduring than that experienced in other and healthier localities. Enforced removals have occurred. Property has been practically abandoned, so that what was formerly the most fertile and wealthiest portion of the county is now the poorest, the most unprofitable, and consequently the least desirable.

Such reverses—for the arrest of which there appears little present hope—have told with fearful effect upon the prosperity of this Church of our Fathers. The supporting population has been largely withdrawn, so that convenient access may no longer be had to these accustomed pews. A violent mutation has supervened, the present influence of which we all sincerely deplore, and the ultimate result of which can only be conjectured. Meanwhile, and until the day dawn, it is manifestly the duty of those who are clothed with the trust, to attend as best they may to the perpetuation of their organization, to the conservation of this sacred property, and, as occasion may occur, to the consummation of such schemes as may appear most suitable for the encouragement of its appropriate uses. Where there are so many holy memories, such a multitude of inspiring traditions, and so many consecrated



graves,—forbidding as the present may seem,—there should be hope of something better in the coming years. At any rate, let present duty be discharged, leaving the rest to God. Let us in no wise prove recreant to the spirit, the energy, and the fortitude of our fathers. Our endurance should prove equal to our calamity; and, although existent circumstances exert their depressing influence and retard the fulfillment of purposes as broad as generous hearts could desire, clinging to the exalted memories of the past and cherishing the ennobling sentiments to which they necessarily and legitimately give birth, let us do what we can to transmit them unimpaired, to testify our grateful appreciation of their value, and to manifest in our walk and conversation their vitalizing power.

During the ceremonies observed at the centennial celebration nearly thirty seven years ago, a corner stone was laid in the green in front of this Church. It was the intention of those who then placed it in position to erect above it a monument in honor of the fathers of this venerable Meeting House, and of the early members of this Midway Congregation. That purpose has never been effectuated. Among the vandal acts perpetrated by Kilpatrick's Cavalry were the wanton removal and rifling of that corner stone. It has been partially recovered; and, in its repaired condition, we are present to day, with filial reverence, to restore it to its original position, and to assume the fulfillment of the laudable design originally contemplated.

Rescued from a lawless fate, again do we, with becoming loyalty and in all good hope, commit this stone to the resting place, and consecrate it to the use which our fathers patriotically designated. May He, whose sleepless eye watches alike over the temple dedicated to His service and the dead who have died in the Lord, guard it from future sacrilege, and preserve it as the corner stone of the monument which we propose here to erect.

Although the tide of active, intelligent life appears, in large measure, to have receded from this long-accustomed shore, although shadows still gather about us and the gloom



of disaster hangs heavily above plantation and highway, although the voice of the pastor is seldom heard within the porches of this almost deserted temple, and the dust of silent Sabbaths settles noiselessly upon altar and pew, we will nevertheless here set up a column in remembrance of all that has been, in praise of those who sleep within the ivy-mantled walls of this Church-yard, in commemoration of the deeds and virtues of our ancestors, and in confident expectation of the rehabilitation of this now wasted community.

There is no cloud which has not its silver lining. Human calamities are finite. The sunlight of tomorrow will dissipate the shadows of today. The mountain laurel will render verdant and beautiful even the crater of the extinct volcano, and the flowers of hope will eventually bloom in the garden of present despair. In the elevation of a memorial shaft above this silent spot we will bespeak a perpetuation of names and events which should not perish from the recollection of the living,—afford gracious confirmation of the fact that this generation is not unmindful of the obligations which it owes to the saintly mothers, and the patriotic sires who labored so long and so well in the cause of religion, of truth, of freedom, and of right,—and testify our unshaken confidence in the early dawn of a brighter day in the history of our Church and County.

While it may not be denied that “deeds, not stones, are the true monuments of the great,” equally certain is it that memorial columns and mortuary shafts are “footprints of history on the pages of time.” Happy is that people whose land is worthy to be thus dignified,—whose soil is hallowed by distinguished graves. Within the confines of this commonwealth we recall no section better entitled to commemoration in this regard than the old County of Liberty. The name which it bears was accorded by common consent in grateful acknowledgment of the patriotism and valor of its inhabitants during that eventful period when the freedom of this commonwealth was purchased by a sublime sacrifice of treasure and of blood. Here dwelt Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Members of the Continental Congress, Governors of the

infant State, clergymen, military leaders, and men of repute in other avocations who might justly stand in marble and in bronze for the veneration and the emulation of the present and the coming generations.

The Congress of the United States ordered that a monument should be builded to the memory of General James Screven who received his death wound within cannon range of the spot where we are now assembled. It has never been reared. The obligation is as binding now as when it was at first solemnly recognized. In relaying this corner stone let us express and cherish the hope that no untoward events or undue procrastination will delay the consummation of our laudable design, but that the purpose which we this day reinaugurate may be speedily accomplished. Thus by a physical embodiment of the exalted memories and valuable traditions of this people, and by symbolizing the general gratitude, will we stimulate a fuller, a prouder recognition of the virtues and the valor of the days that are gone, and encourage nobler efforts for the rehabilitation of a region formerly so favored, and for so many years the abode of refinement, of industry, of morality, of patriotism, and of civilization.

Although those in whose honor we propose to erect this shaft have long since passed into that realm where there are "trees of unfading loveliness, pavements of emerald, canopies of brightest radiance, gardens of deep and tranquil security, palaces of proud and stately decoration, and a city of lofty pinnacles through which there unceasingly flows the river of gladness, and where jubilee is ever rung with the concord of seraphic voices,"—although amid the beatitudes of that eternal home their visions are rapturously fixed upon the glories of the New Jerusalem,—who will deny that it may not prove interesting, nay even grateful to them—our canonized ancestors—to note our loyal impulses, and to mark our filial endeavor to rescue from oblivion the brave deeds which they wrought, the Christian acts which they performed, the triumphs which they achieved, and the worthy reputations which they here bequeathed before they ascended beyond the stars?



